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THOUGHTS

ON

DANCING and the OPERA.

We are disposed to take a view of the first of these amusements, which, to our minds, settles the question as to the propriety of its being participated in by any professed follower of Christ. We know that some in the Church are disposed to regard it as a matter of but little doubt, and to apologize for such as engage in it, whilst they deem those who refuse as over sensitive and scrupulous. They ask us to show the harm in mere dancing, and then, as they profess to see none in it themselves, affirm that they cannot understand why its exercise should be prohibited. In the act itself, laying out of consideration its tendency to foster a spirit of pride and vanity, there is perhaps only the evil which attaches to everything which is not expressly done for, or that may tend to, the glory of God. We would, however, be understood as speaking of what is generally termed dancing; for we presume that no one rightly minded would for a moment attempt to defend the indecorum and lasciviousness of the waltz, and other performances of a similar character. In strictness, every idle word is reprehensible, every waste of time a sin, every light and trifling action and conversation contrary to the precepts of Scripture, and we may therefore safely say, the moments thus spent, which might be given to something better, are thrown away, and for this we are accountable. But we are met by the reply, that we cannot always be occupied in that which is solid and substantial, that we need recreation, and that our minds must occasionally be withdrawn from severe occupation. It is added, too, that the abuse of amusement is no argument against its legitimate employment, that eating and drinking may be carried to excess, and the very blessings of heaven perverted to improper purposes; that we have a right to regale ourselves with the rich provisions of a bountiful providence, although we should avoid gluttony, and that in like manner, though the ball-room is improper and to be avoided, dancing in a private parlor and in a social party is liable to no objection. Now let us concede for the

purpose of argument, that dancing in a small company where the adjuncts of dress and fashion are avoided, where conversation is united with it, and the whole time is not engrossed with the exercise, is not in the abstract positively wrong and sinful, still there is a higher ground, in our opinion, which calls for abstinence from every Christian. *The world deems it inconsistent.* True, it is, there are sometimes expressions heard to the contrary, but if the examination is searchingly made it will be found that our statement is correct. Even where its practice by the Christian may be defended by those who are not of the number, there still frequently remains a lurking suspicion of the sincerity of one who is willing to take the license. The world expects more of Christians than they do of themselves. Their faults are magnified. Satan ever makes the suggestion that they are all hypocrites, and the least departure from what is expected of them, is at once seized upon as a proof of their want of sincerity. Shall then the Christian make the standard of his conduct lower than what it has been made by the world? Is he not bound in this respect to sacrifice his opinions to those who are without? Does he not by running counter to them peril the destiny of others and destroy the influence he should exert for their salvation? Too many indeed of those who profess to be the followers of Christ, forget that they have high and important duties to perform in this respect, that they are accountable for the souls of others, and responsible for the use of every qualification and talent with which they have been entrusted. The service of the Redeemer means something, and if it is called "keeping one's-self unspotted from the world," then tampering with its gaieties and pleasures, or venturing upon the doubtful, is not adorning in all things the doctrine of the Master. If the world adjudges dancing inconsistent with true piety, shall we add our weight to the testimony and thus prove our own hypocrisy? If our opinion does not coincide with this adjudication, have we a right to brave the sentiments of others in a matter of mere amusement, and involving no principle, in order that we may show our liberty and our ability to indulge in what the world considers irreconcilable with our profession? Besides, no one can sufficiently estimate the influence of example. We shall never know the impress which our conduct and actions have made upon those who surround us, until the day of judgment. Our participation in that which is doubtful may be their ruin. Let us suppose, for instance, that a Christian is found in a company where the amusement referred to is proposed. Amongst the number of the

guests is one whose mind has been seriously though secretly turned to the subject of religion. He has been perhaps deterred from an open avowal of his sentiments by the suggestion that all who are in the Church are hypocrites, and that he can be as good outside its enclosure as within. He knows our Christian, and watches his actions. Perhaps his consistency or inconsistency will determine his future course. He waits with anxiety to see whether he will mingle in the dance. He sees him yield, and satisfied of the want of sincerity of all who name the name of Christ, determines to cast forever aside all his religious impressions.

But the excuse is sometimes made that dancing is no more improper than light and frivolous conversation, nor is it, but then we should remember, according to the old adage, two wrongs never make a right, nor should those who love the Redeemer be found indulging in any impropriety. We have heard it, too, occasionally remarked, we see no wrong in the amusement, we do not find it to interfere with our religious duties or the spirituality of our hearts, and why then should we be compelled to yield because the world choses to say to the contrary. But is this a question requiring any hesitancy in its answer, when the salvation of others is at stake? Can we doubt what course we should pursue, if the consequence of our indiscretion may be the ruin of an immortal spirit? If our deprivation of the enjoyment is a sacrifice, are we not ready to make it for the cause of Christ? If we deem it even the yielding to an unfounded prejudice, will there be no consolation in knowing that we are mortifying the flesh for the good of others, and that our constant effort is in nothing to give offence, and that we are striving by this and every other means to bring ruined sinners to Him? It appears to us that views such as these must forever decide our duty.

But we have to examine this subject in another aspect. The Christian moves not only in the world, but also in the Church. In the latter place this matter is at least debateable. His participation in it will affect two classes of his fellow members—the new converts, and those of gay and fickle temperaments, who are more easily led astray than others. Because there are these weak brethren we should be careful and wary. Their very delicacy demands cautious treatment. It is our imperative duty to pursue this course towards them, and we have no right to sacrifice them by any pertinacity in our opinions or by a disregard in non-essentials of theirs. The newly-awakened, full of the ardor of a first love, have enough

to chill them in the coldness and languor of many from whom they expected a warmer greeting, but how much more liable will they be to turn back to the world, when they discover the line which separates them from it so faintly defined, and are tempted by the example of the dancing Christian, to resume the follies they have so recently promised to abandon. Beside these, there are others who need a restraining hand, whose naturally buoyant dispositions lead them occasionally into apparent levity, whose love of social intercourse tempts them very easily to overstep the bounds of propriety, and who, for these very reasons, should be kept in check by the sobriety of demeanor on the part of elder and more mature Christians. We may add to those enumerated, yet another class, who have no marked character and no self-confidence, who frame their own conduct upon that exhibited by others, and who deem that correct, which they see done by those who are more intelligent and more conspicuous in position, and who accordingly go either right or wrong with the models they propose for imitation.

We have selected for our consideration, what perhaps on all hands will be considered as the least objectionable form of worldly amusement, but if our views are correct, we shall have no difficulty of disposing of all others. The same course of reasoning will apply to card playing. In point of fact, there is no greater objection to cards, in themselves, than to any other game however innocent or trivial, and yet prostituted as they have been to the foulest purposes of sin, and knowing, as every one must, how many characters and fortunes have been sacrificed by their fascination, no right minded Christian can for a moment countenance their use, or hold that they may be handled with impunity. Let it be granted he might perhaps innocently indulge in them, yet his example, or even the whispered knowledge of it, might betray another with less steady principles and incapable of self-control, to his present and eternal ruin.

But another form of fashionable amusement has assailed the Church within a few years, and led captive not a few who have professed to name the name of Christ. Whilst many would avoid the theatre as pernicious and not to be tolerated, the opera is supposed to be conducive to refinement of taste, and as affording an amusement in which even Christians may participate. But let us in a few words sum up the evils of the drama, and see whether this new form of temptation differs from it in any degree. The theatre then presents distorted views of human life. Human nature is satarized and ridiculed on the boards of the play-house, but positive examples

of virtue are rarely held forth for imitation. Profanity and vulgarity characterize nearly every play, and the popular taste unfortunately demands their continual repetition. Licentiousness or its consequences, its plots or counter-plots, often forms the principal point of attraction in tragedy or comedy. Old age is only introduced to be laughed at, in the shape of some meddlesome personage who is always in the way, or a drivelling dotard who deems himself the object of fascination to the other sex. A physician is always represented as a quack, a lawyer as a knave, and a divine as a hypocrite. These are but half the evils. The audience gathered together have congenial tastes with the scenic representations and debauchery, drunkenness and sensuality of the lowest description are fostered, find refuge, and are engendered beneath so deleterious an influence. It may be that a majority of the spectators are virtuous, and yet proximity to vice must always contaminate, and whilst the ears are polluted with profanity and impurity, and the imagination excited by suggested debauchery, the eyes can scarcely fail to see the degraded objects drawn together to be companions in an amusement, which has apparently brought the visitors to the theatre upon a common level.

But it is said the opera is free, at least, from contamination with the impure and vicious. Be it so, but the other objectionable features remain. Is it not true that what is there exhibited, appeals to our depraved tastes and natures, and is not calculated to bring into exercise our Christian graces? Is not the plot of nearly every opera, like that of every play, founded upon some story of sensuality and profligacy—some tale of seduction or its consequences—some passage in the life of one who has abandoned her virtue and her God. And is it any excuse that all this is concealed in a foreign language? "Be not partakers of other men's sins," says the word of God, and we are bound to know when we go deliberately to any place of amusement what is being transacted, and what is transpiring before our eyes.

But it is said that the opera is necessary for a cultivation of musical taste, and that music is refined and elevating in its tendencies. We have no wish to depreciate its beneficial effects when rightly employed. But the statement thus made betrays the very reason why the opera is so pernicious. Cannot the concert room refine the public taste as well as the opera? If not, then the opera is only beneficial as creating an unnatural excitement, its worldliness and gay and thoughtless votaries are its prin-

cipal charm, and thus it renders each participant in the amusement less fitted for that holy walk and conversation, that deadness to the world, that living for Christ, that purity of heart and life which should adorn the follower of Jesus.

Perhaps some advocate of this or the other amusements to which we have adverted, may read these pages and yet though professing to be a Christian, is ready to sneer at them as full of cant and hypocrisy. But dear reader, have you never felt the deadening influence of worldliness in crushing out the love of Christ, or experienced what the Saviour means when he speaks of the weeds that choke the good seed and render it unfruitful. When you return from these places of fashionable gratification, your system all flushed with excitement, and your heart still clinging to the world you have professed to abandon, do you pour out your soul before the mercy-seat with the same earnestness that characterized you in days that are past—does the fire burn brightly on your family altar, and can you leave its hallowed influence in order speedily thereafter to drown all recollection of its delightful intercourse with your Father and God, in the frivolities of the dance, the card table, the theatre, or the opera. Whilst the laugh of the thoughtless crowd is vibrating upon your ear, can you pray without ceasing. Do you feel able and are you ready the next day to win souls to Christ, and is that your constant effort, for mark you it is your bounden duty and obligation. Do you attend punctually and regularly the week-day service and the meeting for social prayer and exhortation, or are excuses available for your absence that are not made when amusement is the object?

Alas, how many an earnest pastor has mourned over those whose participation in some of the follies described has sent a pang through his heart, more full of anguish, than when he has stood by the cheerless grave of one who has died impenitent and unreconciled to God. How many a Christian has had in weariness of spirit, and with almost closed lips, to meet the opposition of those who have urged as a reason for not coming to Christ, that some who have professed his name have mingled with the thoughtless and the godless in their unhallowed enjoyments. But hear the apostle as he says—"Avoid even the appearance of evil," and listen to the Redeemer as he thunders in your ears, whilst by your injudicious conduct you are bringing scandal upon his cause, wounding the consciences of his people, and injuring those whom he died to save, "take heed how ye offend one of these little ones

that believe in me, verily I say unto you it were better for such an one that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck and he drowned in the depths of the sea."

We gather then from all these considerations our duty in the premises. Let there be a dividing line between the Church and the world. Grant that perhaps in some cases it is even an arbitrary boundary, still it is better to keep within the limits of the Redeemer's kingdom than to hazard ourselves upon the territory of the enemy. In doubtful cases the Christian's duty is clearly to abstain. Sweet will be any sacrifice made for Christ's sake. Happy will we feel if our dear Master will accept it, or if we can do anything for him even at our personal cost, who hath loved us and washed us in his own precious blood. If it must be so, let life be but a protracted scene of weariness and toil, without relaxation or amusement, if we can but secure the crown of righteousness which God hath promised to those who love him. Deep will be the peace which will pervade our hearts, when we are undisturbed by any doubts as to the correctness of our demeanor, whilst we feel that our skirts are clear from the blood of all men, and that none of the finally impenitent and undone shall be able to point to us at the bar of God, and charge the loss of their souls on our inconsistency.

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